

Thomas F. Barraga
Suffolk County Legislator
187 Sunrise Highway, Suite C
West Islip, New York 11795
(P) 631-854-4100
(F) 631-854-4103

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CONTACT: Megan Ockovic
E-Mail: Megan.Ockovic@suffolkcountyny.gov



NEWS FROM THE 11TH DISTRICT

The Two Minute Warning for Young Football Players and Parents

By: Thomas F. Barraga, Suffolk County Legislator

The other day I was walking by one of the school fields where I watched a large group of young 7 or 8 year old boys playing full contact football. Off to the side were their parents cheering them on as they tackled one another shoulder and shoulder helmet to helmet. With all the medical studies that have been published one wonders what are these parents thinking. Football is a dangerous sport with ever increasing documented cases involving long term debilitating cognitive function and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). Recently the Journal of the American Medical Association published findings adding to the evidence that even mild football contact can cause real and lasting brain damage. The greater damage occurred in players who started young and suffered repeated concussions, traumatic brain injury that typically stems from a blow to the head or violent shaking. An article that appeared in Readers Digest entitled "Breaking up With Football" written by sportswriter Patrick Hruby states the following:

"Everyone knows that football physically destroys its participants from the outside in – breaking bones, smashing shoulders, shredding ligaments... I've met parents mourning the death of their teenage son; former players who get lost driving around their own neighborhoods; scientists describing in microscopic detail how proud, intelligent men become hollow, half-mad husks. I've learned that the NFL can be callous, and fans even more so, and that for many people, ignorance is bliss, **even when it involves the health of their own children.**"

Dr. Robert Cantu, author of "Concussions and Our Kids" a clinical professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at Boston University School of Medicine states that "Tackle football is too dangerous for youngsters. Exposure to head trauma is too risky.

What we know about football and the vulnerability of children's brains leads me to this conclusion. More worrisome is what we don't know. How will the hits absorbed by a 9 year old today be felt at 30 or 50. There are sports in which smashing into your opponent isn't just a possibility - it's the object of the game."

The Readers Digest article quoted "A study of seven and eight year old football players found that some hits generated more than 80 g's of force to their head, equal to blows derived in college football." Parents spend their lives loving and nurturing their young children in the first seven years of life why would they then turn them over to a sport that has the potential of generating permanent physical and mental damage.